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FM AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0641
INFO RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PRIORITY 0294
RUEHVJ/AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO PRIORITY 0065
RUEHPS/USOFFICE PRISTINA PRIORITY 0074
RUEHVB/AMEMBASSY ZAGREB PRIORITY 0120
RUEHSQ/AMEMBASSY SKOPJE PRIORITY 0025
RUEHBM/AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST PRIORITY 0001
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0069
RUEHPOD/AMEMBASSY PODGORICA 0707

UNCLAS PODGORICA 000064

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MONTENEGRO TO RECOGNIZE KOSOVO, BUT NOT YET

REF: STATE 16762

1.(SBU) Summary: FM Rocen sees nothing to prevent GoM recognition of Kosovo, but not until after April Presidential elections. Serbia has made little effort to rally regional support for its position. The GoM continues to push for rapid integration for itself and its neighbors into NATO, and Rocen suggests that Kosovo should be invited to join PfP as soon as possible. End summary.

NO CHANGE IN MONTENEGRO'S POSITION: NO RUSH

2.(SBU) Ambassador delivered reftel demarche to Montenegrin Foreign Minister Milan Rocen (protect) February 21. Rocen reiterated the GoM's (private) position that it does not oppose Kosovo independence, but will not be in a position to recognize it until after April presidential elections (first round on April 6, second round on April 20). In response to the Ambassador's question as to whether Rocen saw any obstacle to speedy recognition once the election is over, the FM said he did not. He noted that a scheduled February 26 visit by a senior Romanian delegation to Montenegro was planned long ago and should not be seen as a Romanian attempt to talk the GoM out of recognizing Kosovo. A decision by Croatia and Macedonia to recognize would also make Montenegro's decision that much easier, Rocen said.

3.(SBU) Rocen discussed the rather tepid efforts that Serbia has made to rally regional support for its position. President Tadic sent a letter to President Vujanovic today (obviously a form letter to all heads of state, Vujanovic reported to Rocen by telephone during our conversation), which left Rocen unimpressed. "Serbia is making no special effort" to win Montenegro over; even Serbian FM Jeremic had not called him. Serbia is instead relying solely on Russia as its champion, he said.

MOVING THE BALKANS INTO EURO-ATLANTIC COMMUNITY

4.(SBU) As he has before, Rocen stressed the importance of integrating countries in the region into the Euro-Atlantic sphere, including NATO. He said Montenegro (probably Rocen and DefMin Vucinic) would present their IPAP to NATO missions in Brussels in mid-March. He also reiterated Montenegro's hope that A3 members Croatia, Macedonia, and Albania would be invited to join NATO at the Bucharest Summit.

5.(SBU) In that same vein, he suggested that Kosovo should be invited to join PfP as soon as possible. The Ambassador noted that it might be difficult to create a consensus to issue an invitation at this early stage, when some member states had yet

to recognize the prospective new member.

6. (SBU) Comment: Given the realities of the upcoming political campaign, it is unlikely the GoM could be persuaded to recognize Kosovo before April. However, while he lamented again the lack of EU consensus to follow, Rocen did not see that -- or anything else -- as a show-stopper for eventual GoM recognition.

17. (SBU) Basically, the ruling DPS is looking at the strong possibility of a second round run-off between DPS incumbent Vujanovic and opposition challenger Medojevic (or possibly Mandic of the Serb List). If the GOM were to take a stand now on recognition, it believes that that would coalesce the entire pro-Serb electorate against Vujanovic.

18. (SBU) The other key issues, of course, are good relations with both Pristina and Belgrade and the GOM's desire to preserve general domestic tranquility - which it has managed to maintain as a result of its balancing act. Given the strength of the pro-Serb forces here and given Kostunica's continuing disdain for Montenegro's separation from Serbia, the GOM believes that Montenegro has a lot more to lose by poisoning its relationship with Serbia than other countries in the region. As President Vujanovic said to the Ambassador once, "imagine our challenge in arguing to our public that we need to recognize Kosovo when another neighboring state like Romania, a member of the EU and NATO and with a tiny Serb population, will not."

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